

Kyodan

News Letter

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FIRST JNAC MEETING IN JAPAN

-- KCCJ Becomes Full Member

The Annual Meeting of the Japan-North American Commission on Cooperative Mission (JNAC) was held in Japan for the first time, Apr. 25-28, beginning at the International House in Tokyo and ending at the Lutheran Hotel in Osaka.

The major action taken was to accept the Korean Christian Church in Japan (KCCJ) for full membership in JNAC. The Rev. LEE In Ha, former Moderator and General Secretary of KCCJ, explained that the decision to apply for full membership in JNAC was combined with an action to develop sister church relations with the Kyodan by the KCCJ General Executive Committee on Apr. 10. He also later stated that the former denominations in Korea, which became one in Japan 70 years ago to form the present day KCCJ, had long historical ties with most of the JNAC-related Boards.

The unanimous approval of the Japan parties was given with the understanding that they would be represented in discussions to decide on the reapportionment of common budget items and the number of delegates to be allocated to Japan member bodies.

-- Reports

A major item of business was the sharing of reports by all JNAC members. The report of the CoC-related Schools Council, given by Prof. KOBAYASHI Nobuo, mentioned the hopes of the Council for direct associate membership in JNAC.

This proposal originated in the Schools Council 12-member Committee and will now go to the Council's full membership for consideration. When asked to comment on this item, Frank E. CAREY, JNAC Chairperson stated that "we are waiting for the process to develop as it was outlined to us, with the schools discussing their particular point of view at the full meeting of the Schools Council in June. If there is any proposal coming from that it will be discussed with the other partners in the CoC, and only after that will the North American partners be asked to comment. We have agreed that we are not going to give advice or make comments until the earlier part of the process has had a chance to develop."

-- Budget and Work Funds

Although the various askings by Japan

members for 1979 were approved, there was no certainty that these items could be met since only 85% of the '77 askings and only 36% of the '78 askings had been received. The North American Boards seemed to have no immediate solution to the problem of this yearly decrease in underwritings plus the additional loss resulting from the devaluation of the dollar.

On the positive side were the yearly increases in shared support from related institutions in Japan. FUSE Hideo, CoC Acting General Secretary, reported receipts of over ¥57 million for the first four months of '78 as compared with ¥96 million for all of '77, ¥85 million for '76 and ¥57 million for '75. The increase in Japanese responsibility for missionary support was echoed in the action related to missionary work funds which reaffirmed that, as a general rule, work funds will become the responsibility of the Japan side after Jan. 1, 1979.

-- More Than Business

-- Dialog With Japan Partners

Besides its regular business sessions, the JNAC members devoted a day and a half in Tokyo and the better part of two days in Osaka to meet with their various counterparts in Japan as well as observing firsthand the work of churches in dealing with minority issues.

"Extra-curricular" sessions were held separately in Tokyo with representatives of the three CoC-related bodies, namely the Social Work League, the Schools Council, and the Kyodan Commission on Mission. In Osaka an evening was given to the Missionary Maintenance Committee, a day to the KCCJ and an afternoon and evening to the Kyodan Special Committee on Buraku Discrimination and the Kansai Urban Industrial Mission Group.

As remarked by Chairperson Carey, "the opportunity to talk at some depth with the three constituent partners of CoC about the tensions within the CoC was a significant element of this Annual Meeting. The opportunity to engage in this kind of discussion in Japan where there was the possibility of wider participation--rather than with only 4 or 5 persons representing the Japanese church--was an accomplishment. We hope that the reverse was also true: --having a wider group on the Japan side being exposed to the total JNAC group instead of only their representatives as in the past."

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SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE TAKES UP NARITA AIRPORT ISSUE

As we go to press this month the eyes of the nation, and of much of the world, are on the new Tokyo airport. Will the long-delayed opening go off smoothly on May 20th? Or will it be postponed again? Will there be a violent confrontation of opposing forces? Will radical opponents of the airport again delay the proceedings? In such a situation what can a Christian do? What is the role of the church? What does the Gospel say?

With such questions in mind, the Kyodan's Committee on Social Concerns, chaired by Rev. TOKUNAGA Goro, gave serious attention at its last meeting, Apr. 3-4, to the Sanrizuka Issue (Sanrizuka is the name of the local area where the airport has been built) and decided to take a stand, as a committee, in the human rights struggle of the farmers protesting against the airport opening. The Committee agreed to send an open letter to "Airline Companies and Pilots' Associations" and a similar letter to sister churches.

Both letters call attention to injustices involved in the construction of the Narita facility and dangers involved in its operation. They were issued on Apr. 28 over the signature of the committee chairperson.

The message to the churches was sent to about 180 WCC and CCA member churches in other countries. A Japanese version went to churches in Japan and was distributed to the press.

Both letters emphasize:

- 1) the arbitrary choice of the site with no prior consultation with the farmers who would be displaced or inconvenienced, and the forced acquisition of the land of those who refused to sell;
- 2) the technical safety problems related to wind currents and prevailing weather conditions, the already obsolescent traffic control system, fuel storage and transport and the maintenance of security in the face of threats from opposition groups.

The letters take the position that "the movement against Narita Airport is not in essence an opposition to the airport itself but a resistance movement against the actions of state power and the industrial complex related to the Airport Corporation.It has now become a wide spread liberation struggle for human dignity."

The letters conclude with appeals for supportive action. Airlines and pilots are asked to refuse to use the airport and to

appeal to the Japanese government not to open it. Churches are urged "to take up the Narita airport issue from the viewpoint of the gospel, and to work for the abolition of this airport filled with contradictions and dangers by appealing to the Japanese government to put a freeze on its plans to operate the airport."

The Narita Airport issue goes back 12 years to 1966 when, after considering various sites, the government chose Sanrizuka, which had been Imperial land before the war and still contained an Imperial horse pasture, and had been settled after the war by repatriates from overseas. Inferior land was made available for relocating those who wished to continue farming, compulsory eviction notices were sent out, and surveying and construction were pushed ahead over protests by farmers and radical student groups. The majority of the farmers accepted compensation or alternate land, but others have continued to protest the government's unilateral action and struggle against it.

TOMURA Isaku, chairperson of the league of farmers opposed to the Narita Airport, is a baptized Christian and has sought support within the church as well as in the secular world. The whole situation is complicated and controversial, but some Kyodan pastors and church people, including some members of the Committee on Social Concerns, have been trying to respond individually to what they see as an infringement of human dignity and rights. Since January a short-term missionary couple from the U.S., Peter and Elyn MacInnis, both ordained, have been attempting to carry on a Christian ministry in the explosive situation. At the end of March an interdenominational group of concerned Christians held a week-long seminar.

Some 11th hour overtures have been made toward talks between the anti-airport league and the Transport Ministry, but there appears to be little likelihood that either side can fully meet the conditions of the other. The anti-airport league is calling for the release of three league officers arrested in clashes with riot police, the postponement of the airport opening, and the withdrawal of security police and the new security legislation passed by the Diet on May 12 in spite of strong objections from opposition parties. On the other hand, the government with its prestige and extensive investment in the balance, is determined to carry out the May 20 opening, removing at least some of the "solidarity huts" and other structures protesters have erected around the airport perimeter.

CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE UNDER THE EMPEROR SYSTEM?

Part.II. "Gengo"

by Helen POST

元号

Following the article on "Kimi gayo" in the April issue, we now turn to another vestige of the Emperor system -- "Gengo" or the use of one era name for the reign of one emperor.

Meiji 1-45	1868-1912
Taisho 1-15	1912-1926
Showa 1-	1926-

MEIJI.....TAISHO.....SHOWA.....?

Japan lives by two calendars. One is the "Gengo" calendar, which identifies this as Showa 53 or the 53rd year in the reign of the present emperor. The other is the international Christian calendar, in which this is the year 1978. The three "Gengo"--MEIJI, TAISHO and SHOWA--are used in many activities of daily life and particularly in Japanese written materials and official records. On the other hand, Japanese materials related to world events and international relationships, and materials in English, tend to use the Christian year. Often, in printed materials, both designations are used.

The naming of a particular period of time was introduced into Japan from China in the year 645, when Emperor KOTOKU proclaimed the Taika Era. Five years later, when he received a gift of white pheasants, he considered it auspicious and proclaimed a new era, that of the Hakuchi (白雉) or white pheasant. From then on, over a period of some 1,200 years, the practice of naming a new era to mark an event of national importance--good or bad--continued. Some eras lasted only a few years; the longest, 45 years.

At one time, naming a period of history was thought to provide a kind of magical effect. Gradually, a national calendar was seen as establishing a national consciousness and sense of unity, as well as reaffirming the power of the ruler.

In 1868, the leaders of the Meiji Restoration issued an imperial edict establishing the principle of one era for one emperor. The name Meiji (明治), meaning Enlightened Government, was chosen for the era that began that year. It signified the intention to modernize Japan through the importation of forms from Europe. The emperor became known as the Emperor Meiji, and the term "Meiji" began to be applied to the government of that period, as well as to events, architecture and attitudes.

When the Emperor Meiji died in 1912 and his son succeeded to the throne, the name "Taisho" (大正) was adopted, meaning Great Righteousness. This, according to some

scholars, was a kind of admonition to the people at a time of slackening moral standards within the country and tenuous relations internationally.

In 1962, when Hirohito became Emperor, he proclaimed the era of Showa (昭和), Brilliant Peace. It became a very dark period of Japanese history, however, marked by militarism and war. Following Japan's defeat, the Showa Era continued, although the Emperor was designated as the symbol of the state rather than its sovereign in the post-war constitution, and the new constitution made no provision for designating era names in the future.

Today the use of "Meiji", "Taisho" and "Showa" is widespread, particularly in referring to events of the past. The terms provide a clue to people's ages, the context of events, ways of thinking. For instance, "Meiji people" are those who are past the age of 65, experienced first-hand some of the events of Meiji, and are expected to be somewhat conservative and old-fashioned. "Taisho people" are between the ages of 53 and 65, grew up during the period of the so-called Taisho Democracy, and are thought of as being more liberal than the Meiji generations. As for the "Showa people," they are, by comparison, "younger," although the era includes people born over a span of more than 50 years and both before and after the war; but compared with their Meiji and Taisho elders, they are deemed lacking in experience and wisdom.

The double calendar--"Gengo" and Christian--often proves confusing, and every pocket memo includes a well-thumbed parallel list of dates to translate one person's Meiji 23 or Showa 13 into another person's A.D. 1890 or 1938.

What next?

The question floating just under the surface of consciousness today is, "What will happen after Showa?" When, in the natural course of events, the Showa Era ends, what will come next?

Will the practice of one era-one emperor come to an end? If so, democratic Japan

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"Gengo" Issue (continued)

will be free of one of the practices left over from the imperial past. However, some people oppose adoption of the international calendar because it is derived from the Christian faith.

Will a new system for making time be devised, one considered appropriate for the Japanese democracy? One suggestion is a return to the ancient pattern of 60-year cycles, which was in effect before Emperor Kotoku began naming eras.

Or will an attempt be made to continue the present system, designating a new name to continue through the life of the next emperor?

The government has been studying the "gengo" issue. A review authorized in 1961 never got off the ground, but since 1974 a more aggressive approach has been taken, with hearings and surveys of public opinion. In October, 1977, FUJITA Masaaki, Cabinet General Affairs Secretary, reported to the Cabinet Committee of the House of Councillors that, on the basis of a survey showing that 79% of the population favors retaining "Gengo," the government had "decided informally to continue naming eras according to the practice of one era for the lifetime of one emperor." He did not state how the decision would be formalized or implemented.

The Kyodan's Special Committee on the Yasukuni Shrine Problem has also been studying the "Gengo" issue, seeing it as part of the Emperor system "package." As early as 1962 the Kyodan General Assembly voted to use the Christian Year in its materials. In early 1977 the same committee published and distributed to the churches a research pamphlet on the use of era names: the

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JNAC Meeting in Japan (cont'd from p. 1)

After the consultation with Kyodan members, the Rev. DOMON Kazuo remarked, "I'm beginning to get the picture of what it's all about for the first time. Up to now, all the talk I had heard about JNAC and CoC was incomprehensible to me as a local pastor and member of the Commission on Mission. This consultation was a good beginning."

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origin of the practice in China and its use in other Asian countries; the practice followed in Islamic and other countries with special calendars; the past and present positions of the Japanese government and Liberal Democratic Party leaders; and opinions from those who favor and those who oppose the continuation of "Gengo."

In November of last year, the Committee issued a statement citing the dangers in continuing a practice which orients all the events of life around the reign of an emperor. Portions of that statement, issued over the name of OOSIMA Koiti, Chairperson, follow:

The one lifetime-one era system is something that seeks to dominate the concept of time in people's lives and divide it into sections that revolve around the emperor. It also is tied to strengthening the Emperor system.

Forced use of the "Gengo" violates freedom of thought and is clearly contrary to the spirit of the constitution, which is the sovereignty of the people.

From now on, as international interchange is strengthened and the Japanese people need to become more conscious of the world, the "Gengo" will result, rather, in making the Japanese people feel more isolated and more nationalistic.

In order to consider the history of Japan in the context of the world, we think of the use of the Christian era as natural because it is part of our consciousness and practice.

Basing its arguments for legislation to continue the "Gengo" on a survey of public opinion, the government explains that the majority of the people support the "Gengo" system. To think that what one has been doing is convenient is characteristic of human nature, but to take this as grounds for a decision for something that embraces the future is to choose to reverse the course of history.

For reasons of this kind we strongly oppose any legislation that would continue the "Gengo."

** The materials, used in preparing Part I on Kimi ga yo and Part II on Gengo, can be borrowed from the Special Committee on the Yasukuni Shrine Issue.

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